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ART AMONG THE BALLAD-MONGERS.*

By LLEWELLYNN JEWITT, F.S.A.



THE "Ballad hero," Robin Hood, with his wondrous doings in "Merrie Sherwood," was, of all others, the most prolific source of inspiration to the ballad writer, and none in the whole range of "folk-song" were more popular than those which recounted his strange adventures. These, too, were so stirring in their circumstances, and in many instances so startling in their character, that the designer of the "cuts" had no lack of subjects from which to design his pictures. That Robin Hood was a veritable personage I have not in my own mind even the remotest shadow of a doubt, and, indeed, both Hunter and Gutch,† the two most reliable authorities on Robin Hood lore, have satisfactorily proved such to be the case. This, however, is a matter on which in this chapter it is not necessary to enter; the woodcuts of some of the ballads relating to the noble outlaw are all I have to do with, and these are "plenty as blackberries."

Some of the Robin Hood ballads are of a general nature; others relate to his prowess in the field, others to his success in the chase; and others again, with his "merry, merry men," to the robbery from some and the giving to others of "needful gold." The localities chiefly commemorated in these ballads are Sherwood Forest and adjoining parts of Nottinghamshire, and Derbyshire,

with a part of Yorkshire. In Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire numerous places are named after the hero, and numbers of localities have been, according to tradition, the scenes of his exploits. In the latter county also some of the relatives of his family resided, and of its soil his faithful friend and follower "Little John" is said not only to have been a worthy son, but to have died and been buried at Hathersage, the place of his birth. A very curious ballad, in many respects equally curious in its allusions to localities as the "Lytell Geste" printed by Wynken de Worde, is the one entitled *A New Ballad of Robin Hood, showing his Birth, Breeding, Valour, and Marriage, at Titbury Bull-running: Calculated for the Meridian of Staffordshire, but may serve for Derbyshire or Kent*. Of this ballad copies exist in the Roxburghe and Pepys collections, as well as in my own, the woodcuts naturally varying. In the copy in the Roxburghe collection the woodcut (Fig. 20, 2nd paper) occurs; while my own broadsheet bears a far more appropriate design, on which are represented Robin Hood with buckler and quarter-staff, and Clorinda, another name for "Maid Marian," wearing a tall hat, somewhat after the Welsh fashion, and holding a bow in her hand; the entrance to the church in the background. The ballad, which is written as though told by the king of the fiddlers, who played at the wedding, recounts the birth,



Fig. 22.



Fig. 23.



Fig. 24.

parentage, and family connections of the hero; his introduction to his uncle, Squire Gamwell; his prowess at games while there; his meeting with Little John; his visit to Sherwood Forest, and there meeting Clorinda, "the Queen of the Shepherds," whose—

"... gown was of Velvet as green as the Grass,
and her Buskin did reach to her Knee,
Her Gate it was graceful, her Body was strait
and her Countenance free from Pride:
A Bow in her Hand, and Quiver and Arrows,
hung dangling by her sweet Side;
Her Eye-brows were black, ay, and so was her Hair,
and her Chin was as smooth as Glass;
Her Visage spoke Wisdom and Modesty too,
sets with Robin Hood such a Lass.
Said Robin Hood, 'Lady fair, whether away,
oh w'ither fair Lady away?'
And she made him Answer, 'to kill a fat Buck,
for to-morrow is Titbury‡ Day.'"

* Continued from page 121, vol. 1878.

† For an admirable paper on Robin Hood, by Mr. Gutch, see *The Reliquary*, vol. i. pp. 130—143.

‡ "Titbury Day" was the day on which the "Minstrels' Court," with its "Bull-

The outlaw, smitten with the maiden, invited her to his "green bower" to rest awhile, and she should have of good

running" and other wild amusements, was held. The Minstrels' Court at Tutbury, to which all minstrels living in the counties of Stafford and Derby did service, was presided over by a "King of the Minstrels," who was selected yearly by the four stewards, two of whom were chosen from the minstrels of Derbyshire, and the other two from those of Staffordshire. The court was held before the Stewards of the honour of Tutbury, on the morrow after the Assumption. A deed of "John of Gaunt, King of Castile and Leon, Duke of Lancaster," dated in the fourth of Richard II., confers certain powers on the "King of the Minstrels in our honour of Tutbury," and speaks of service and homage which even then had been performed by the Minstrels "from ancient times." By a later instrument it was ordered "that no person shall use or exercise the art and science of music within the said counties, as a common musician or minstrel, for benefit or gains, except he have served and been brought up in the same art and science by the space of seven years, and be allowed and admitted so to do at the said court by the jury thereof," under certain fines; that he shall not teach or instruct any one for a less time than seven years; and that he shall, under pain of forfeit, appear yearly at the "Minstrels' Court." On the day of holding the court,—"Tutbury Day," as it is called in the ballad,—all the minstrels within the honour came to the Bailiff of the Manor, and proceeded in procession to the parish church, the "King" walking between the Bailiff of the Manor and the Steward of the Minstrels' Court, and attended by his own four Stewards, bearing white wands. From church they proceeded in the same order to the Castle hall, where the "King"

bucks "a brace or a lease in an hour," but on the way there, seeing a number of bucks—

"She chose out the fattest that was in the Herd
and she shot him through side and side,"

much to the astonishment of "bold Robin," who declared "by the faith of my body," he never saw woman like her. He immediately after proposed to her, was accepted, and offered to "send for Priest" that they might be married off-hand:—



Fig. 25.



Fig. 26.



Fig. 27.

"But she said, 'It may not be so, gentle Sir,
for I must be at Titbury Feast:
And if Robin Hood will go thither with me
I'll make him the most welcome guest.'"

Accordingly they went to Tutbury, had adventures by the way,

met the Minstrels' procession, with the bull and the Morris dancers and singers, "singing Arthur a Bradley" (a ballad whose hero probably takes his origin from Bradley in the same neighbourhood), had a jolly dinner, and then—



Fig. 28.—Robin Hood and the Bishop.

"When dinner was ended, Sir Roger the Parson
of Dubbridge* was sent for in haste;
He brought his Mass-Book, and he bid them take hands,
and he join'd them in Marriage full fast."

took his seat, with the Bailiff and Steward on either side. The court was then opened by proclamation ordering that every minstrel dwelling within the honour of Tutbury, either in the counties of Derby, Stafford, Nottingham, Warwick, or Lancaster, should draw near and give his attendance, and that all pleas would be heard, and fines and amercements made. The musicians having been called over by court roll, two juries were empanelled and charged. The jurors then proceeded to the selection of officers for the ensuing year. The jurors having left the court for the purpose, the King and Stewards partook of a banquet, while the musicians played their best on their respective instruments. On the return of the jurors they presented the new King whom they had chosen from the four Stewards, upon which the old King, rising, delivered to him his wand of office, and drank a cup of wine to his health and prosperity. In like manner the old Stewards saluted, and resigned their offices to their successors. This ended, the court rose, and adjourned to a general banquet in another part of the castle. The sports of the day then commenced by a wild and infuriated bull being turned loose for the minstrels to catch. The bull was thus prepared: his horns were sawn off close to the head; his tail cut off to the stump; his ears cropped; his body

The forester and his bride then returned to his "green bower" in merry Sherwood, when his "merry men" brought garlands and had the inevitable dance and feast.

rubbed all over with grease; and his nostrils, to madden him still further, blown full of pepper. While these preparations were being made, the Steward made proclamation that all manner of persons should give way to the bull, no person coming nearer to it than forty feet, except the minstrels, but that all should attend to their own safety, every one at his peril. The bull being then turned out, was to be caught by some one of the minstrels, and no one else, between that hour and sunset on the same day, within the county of Stafford. If he escaped, he remained the property of the person who gave it (formerly the Prior of Tutbury); but if any of the minstrels could lay hold of him so as to cut off a portion of his hair and bring it to the Market Cross, he was caught and taken to the Bailiff, by whom he was fastened with a rope, &c., and then brought to the bull-ring in the High Street, where he was baited by dogs. After this the minstrels could either sell him or divide him amongst themselves. This custom appears to have prevailed from 1377 to 1778, when it was very properly discontinued. The day was one of feasting, revelry, and great excitement for the whole district.

* This was the village of Doveridge close at hand.

A characteristic Robin Hood woodcut is Fig. 1 (1st paper). It is taken from a black-letter ballad, "Renowned Robin Hood," and also from a curious "Robin Hood Garland." The centre figure is the hero himself, the other two probably being Little John and Will Scathlock (or Scarlet). This ballad, says Mr. Chappell, "is indeed a strange invention; it brings Robin Hood down to the reign of Henry VIII., presumably because that king was a great patron of archery. It makes Queen Katharine an accomplice in his robberies, by sharing in the plunder, and to employ this outlaw and his fellows as instruments to win a wager of three hundred tuns of wine, three hundred tuns of beer, and three hundred of the fattest deer, from the unsuspecting king. The bet was, indeed, a right royal one, and no doubt it was thought to be very appropriate, as between a king and a queen." Another cut on the same ballad is Fig. 22, which probably did duty as a representation of Queen Katharine; it is a more than usually interesting example of costume.

Fig. 23, an admirable woodcut, boldly drawn, clearly engraved, and excellent in all its details, is from a black-letter ballad entitled "Robin Hood newly reviv'd, or Robin Hood and the Stranger," which originally formed the first part of "Robin Hood, Will Scadlock, and Little John." The "stranger," whose "doublet was of silk," and whose "stockings like scarlet

shone," turned out to be no other than "young Gamwell," "couzen of Robin Hood," being "his own dear sister's son," and the result of the meeting and fray was this discovery, and Robin's taking him into his retinue—a resolution he thus made known to his chief man, Little John:—

" . . . he shall be a bold yeoman of mine,
My chief man next unto thee;
And I, Robin Hood, and thou, Little John,
And Scarlet, he shall be."

The woodcut evidently represents this redoubtable trio. The same cut occurs at the head of another curious black-letter broadsheet entitled *Robin Hood, Will Scadlock [Scarlet], and Little John; or, A Narrative of their Victory obtained against the Prince of Aragon and the two Giants; and how Will Scadlock married the Princess*. It recounts the defeat of "the Proud Prince of Aragon" and his two attendant giants, at "London upon the Thames," by this trio; and the Princess's choice of "Will Scadlock," as the one of her deliverers on whom her hand was to be bestowed; the *dénouement* being that Scadlock ["young Gamwell"] was recognised by his father, "a noble lord," "of Maxfield [Macclesfield], Earl was he," who had thought him "gone, or rather dead," and the whole ending with the wedding and much merriment.



Fig. 29.



Fig. 30.



Fig. 31.

The cut (Fig. 26), of a 'Wild Man of the Woods,' was evidently in this ballad intended to convey to the popular mind an idea of the terrible "Goliaths that stood on either side" Aragon's prince.

Figs. 3 (1st paper) and 28 belong to, and are strictly correct illustrations of, the curious early ballad of *Robin Hood and the Bishop*; showing how Robin Hood went to an Old Woman and changed Cloaths with her, to escape from the Bishop; and how he robb'd him of all his gold, and made him sing a Mass. The first shows the outlaw standing at the "little house" talking to the "old wife" with whom he changed clothes, to avoid being seized by the Bishop and his retinue, who are seen riding in the distance:—

"Then give me soon thy coat of grey,
and take thou my mantle of green;
Thy spindle and twine unto me resign,
and take thou my arrows so keen."

The second cut shows the Bishop, after Robin Hood's stratagem had succeeded, tied "fast to a tree" while Robin himself does the robbing by taking the prelate's

" mantle from 's back,
and spread it upon the ground,
And out of the Bishop's portmantle he
soon told five hundred pound."

And here let me point out not only the costume of the Bishop, but the fact that each piece of money is marked with the cross, the same as on the pennies of the earlier reigns, which enabled them to be divided by breaking into "four things," or farthings. The cross continued in one form or other to be used on the reverses of coins down to Queen Elizabeth's issues. These are not a tithe of the woodcuts that might be cited as "adorning" the metrical accounts of the "ballad hero's" stirring adventures, but they are characteristic examples, and as such are enough for my present chapter.

Fig. 21 (2nd paper) I have selected from many others as showing two shepherds with their "crooks" and flocks at sunrise or sunset. The crook, it is pleasant to see, is of precisely the same form as still used by shepherds in our own day, and reminds one of the spiritual crook or crosier of prelates, emblematic of their care of the human "flocks" committed to their charge.

Two remarkable cuts specially designed, it will be seen, for illustration of the ballad they adorn, are Figs. 11 and 12 (2nd paper). The original title of the ballad (of which no other copy is known) is missing in the Roxburghe collection, but the gist of it is the old, old story of the father hoarding wealth for his successors, and his spendthrift son wasting it.—"What the Father gathereth by the Rake, the Sonne doth scatter with the Forke."

[To be continued.]